Bookhounds of London

North London Rumours

A peculiar client seeks any playbill, notice, or journal from 1867 or 1868 that mentions Peter Giovanelli's Royal Alexandra Theatre (in Highbury) or Smith's Cremorne Gardens (in Chelsea). His specific interest is "Natator, the Man-Frog" who was exhibited at those two pleasure-domes, and who apparently vanished in 1869.

Imre Szentes, a Hungarian Communist expatriate living in Clerkenwell, has been collecting every book he can find that discusses the case of Elizabeth Bathory, the necromancer, kidnapper, and so-called "Blood Countess of Transylvania." He offers considerable sums for variant editions of Father Laszlo Turoczy's two books on the topic, Ungaria Suis Regibus Compendio (Nagyszombat, 1729) and Bathory Erszebet (Buda, 1744). What does an exiled Communist think he can discover about a dead vampire?

In 1862, Dante Gabriel Rossetti buried the only copy of his poems in Highgate Cemetery with his wife Elizabeth Siddal, a rumored suicide by laudanum after a stillbirth. In 1869, Rossetti's friend, the forger and blackmailer Charles Augustus Howell, exhumed Siddal's body at night and claimed to have recovered the book of poems, partially eaten away by a worm. Rossetti published the poems as his, but the scandal nearly destroyed him; Howell turned up with his throat slit in Chelsea in 1890, a ten-shilling coin in his mouth. Now, Evander Corder, a would-be necromancer and wannabe poet, believes the poems Rossetti published were "collaborations with the dead," and plans his own Highgate experiments on that line.

For the right price, Paul Levaire, an orderly at Colney Hatch, can get books (or other written material) into – or out of – the patients' common rooms. For a slightly wronger price, he can get them into – or out of – the patients' individual rooms, or the effects lockers where anything they might have been clutching in a frenzy would be stored. His stock in trade includes pornography, journals and notebooks compiled and composed by patients, and less easily classified works.